

PLENARY PANEL THREE: Reading the Archives and Beyond

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“The keenest, most intimate analysis”: Profiling Female Stars of the Silent Screen in *Photoplay Magazine*

In 1911, *Photoplay Magazine* was launched in the U.S. as one of the first two periodicals devoted to fans of Hollywood silent cinema, and within a decade became recognized as the leading publication for celebrity news. *Photoplay* emerged within the broader context of modernism, the period from around 1880 to 1940 defined by a series of movements and manifestos dedicated to artistic, cultural, and political revolutions. While there has been an increasing body of scholarship at the nexus of modernism, cinema, and celebrity culture, to date the relationship between modernism and fan magazines remains surprisingly unstudied, a lacunae this paper redresses. In particular, I draw on Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz’s mapping of the “new modernist studies” that aims to expand our theoretical and methodological approaches to modernism to include, among other areas, popular culture, mass media, and women’s contributions—points of intersecting relevance to *Photoplay*. This paper discusses the new genre of the fan magazine as a specifically female space affording historically unprecedented auto/biographical inscriptions of women as professional and public figures via star profiles, interviews, auto/biographical narratives, and photo spreads. Based on archival studies of the original magazines published in the 1910s and 1920s as accessed through the online Media History Digital Library, this paper also foregrounds the “new modernist” turn to digital humanities, one that expands the possibilities for life-writing scholarship today.

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